

Testimony of Kim Beauregard, President and CEO of InterCommunity Health Care

***H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING
JUNE 30, 2023.**

***Re: Dept. of Mental Health and Addiction Services- Substance Abuse Treatment Funding
Appropriations Health Subcommittee, February 24, 2022***

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 5037- An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. My name is Kim Beauregard, and I am the President and CEO of InterCommunity Health Care. We're a nonprofit community health center providing primary care, mental health care, and addiction recovery services to more than 10,000 individuals annually in Hartford, East Hartford, and South Windsor.

InterCommunity, like many nonprofits, offers a safety net to thousands of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. When many businesses shut down during the height of the pandemic, our doors stayed open. Our detox center and residential programs continued to operate, and our staff, considered essential workers, risked their health to come in each and every day to keep these programs running.

We served – and continue to serve – the people in this state hit hardest socially and economically, whose health care needs have only increased as a result of the pandemic. In spite of years of chronic underfunding, we have stepped up to address the raging opioid epidemic, the worse drug epidemic in modern American history. We are providing critical mental health services to children and adults as Connecticut, and the rest of the country, experiences a mental health crisis. The American Academy of Pediatrics and other organizations have declared a national state of emergency in child and adolescent mental health. Just two months ago, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a public advisory regarding the significant and alarming increase in mental health issues, particularly among youth.

We are on the front lines of the opioid epidemic and see firsthand the urgent need for mental health and addiction recovery services. In December 2021, the Hartford Courant and Connecticut Mirror reported that children with psychiatric needs are overwhelming hospital emergency departments across the state. There has been a steep increase in children presenting with suicidal ideation since the pandemic. On a national level, U.S. Surgeon General

reports that the proportion of high school students reporting persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness increased by 40 percent. In addition, symptoms of anxiety and depression have doubled among youth, with 25 percent reporting symptoms of depression and 20 percent reporting symptoms of anxiety. With regard to substance use, the Connecticut Department of Public Health notes that drug overdose deaths have soared in Connecticut, increasing by 14.6 percent over the previous year. Overdose deaths continued to rise in 2021. Nationally, there have been over 100,000 drug overdose deaths from March 2020 to April 2021, an increase of 28.5 percent from the previous year. It is clear that mental health and addiction recovery services are urgently needed.

Yet - year after year, our requests for funding to keep up with the demand go unheeded by the Connecticut legislature. Nonprofits have taken a disproportionate hit whenever the state makes budget cuts and have never recovered the ground that was lost during Connecticut's recession.

Nonprofits can't continue to be the safety net that so many people depend upon when rising operating costs make it nearly impossible for us to meet expenses. Like every other business, we have seen costs increase for medical insurance, unemployment insurance, rent, and more.

The dedicated people who work for nonprofits have bills to pay too, but most nonprofits cannot afford to match the generous salary and benefit packages of state government or the private sector. Now, as the state enjoys an influx of federal monies, it is high time to recognize and properly fund the nonprofits that provide high quality and cost-efficient services for the government and literally save lives every single day.